ARTHUR BACHE WALKOM, 1889–1976

(*Memorial Series No.* 25)

In the domestic annals of the Linnean Society of New South Wales, three names deserve particular honour—Macleay, Fletcher and Walkom. Sir William Macleay, our founding president, through his munificence made the society financially viable in its first century ; J. J. Fletcher and, later A. B. Walkom more than any others in that time made it work. Fletcher, of course, was chosen by Macleay (in the early days he even paid Fletcher's salary) to run the society from day to day which he did first as Director and Librarian (1886–1892) and from 1893 to 1919 as Secretary. When Fletcher retired, the council selected as his successor a young and active geologist from Brisbane, a man who while still a Sydney undergraduate in 1909 had joined the society. Dr. A. B. Walkom thus came on council as an *ex officio* member to begin a career that has broken all records. Excepting only that of Macleay Bacteriologist, no post honorary or salaried in the appointment of the society was not at some time held by him. When he withdrew from active membership of council in 1972 he had completed 53 years of unbroken service. In recognition of this extraordinary record he was accorded the then unique title of councillor emeritus and so continued an association with council. It had lasted 57 years when he died after a short illness in Sydney on 2nd July 1976.

Arthur Bache Walkom was born at Grafton, N.S.W., on 8th February 1889. While still a boy his family removed to Sydney where Walkom attended the old Fort Street Model School, excelling scholastically as well as in cricket and Rugby. Sport remained a matter of keen interest throughout his life. For many years an enthusiastic tennis player, he served from 1924 to 1935 on the council of the N.S.W. Lawn Tennis Association ; later he became a devotee of the game of bowls and an ardent follower of televised cricket tests.

Walkom's interest in natural science similarly dated from his youth. His father, an engineer and keen amateur of conchology, regularly attended meetings of the Naturalists' Club, often taking his son with him. Like so many young men of his time who went on to the University of Sydney to study science, Walkom fell under the spell of Edgeworth David and elected to take up geology. He graduated early in 1910 gaining First Class Honours in Geology and Mineralogy (sharing the University Medal with W. R. Browne) and Second Class Honours in Chemistry. Walkom managed to beat Browne for the only geological post then available, that of junior demonstrator in the Sydney department, and continued thus until 1st April 1912 when he became Linnean Macleay Fellow in Geology.

In the present age of specialization, students of geology even as undergraduates tend to opt for some particular aspect of their subject. It was not so in David's time. Walkom's earliest publications cover a remarkable spread—from a fossil coral from Yass to a study of the petrography of volcanic rocks and sediments of the Pokolbin area, undertaken with W. R. Browne. There was also finished in 1911 a useful paper on the petrography of samples collected during the Shackleton expedition and brought back by David. For that work, and for another contribution (by W. G. Woolnough) to the expedition reports, Walkom and his friend and contemporary graduate G. J. Burrows (1888–1950), later Senior Lecturer in Chemistry at the university, learned the discipline of silicate analysis, thereby contributing some of the earliest chemical data for Antarctic rocks.

As Macleay Fellow, Walkom began an ambitious study of what were then termed Permo-Carboniferous (now Permian) rocks in Australia and Tasmania, giving particular attention to problems of palaeogeography of the period. The work had not ranged much beyond the area about Maitland and Singleton when the offer of an assistant-lectureship in Geology at the University of Queensland led to resignation of the fellowship at the end of February 1913. Of the papers resulting from that short tenure, two, in particular, still command interest—that on the Maitland-Branxton district with its detailed faunal lists for the marine Permian beds and that on the Permian inlier known as the Cranky Corner basin. Walkom's debt to Edgeworth David, who had pioneered study of the coal-bearing succession in the Hunter valley when an officer of the N.S.W. Geological Survey, is explicit in these studies as is acknowledgement of the guidance of W. S. Dun*, palaeontologist to the Survey and part-time lecturer at the university.

Although brief, Walkom's term as Macleay Fellow was decisive in his research career. Petrology and chemistry were set aside; henceforth the problems of palaeontology, stratigraphy and palaeogeography became principal interests.

Moving to Brisbane in March 1913, Walkom found a small department with only a handful of students. The first lecturer (H. C. Richards, later professor) had been appointed only two years before so there was still much to be done by way of establishing an effective regime for teaching. Walkom took over all the senior teaching in palaeontology as well as some of the more general courses and did much towards organizing collections for instruction and research. Walkom realized at this time a particular need for Australians to develop expertise in fossil botany, a field relatively neglected here. Whereas much notable work had been done on fossil animals, vertebrate and invertebrate, the literature on Australian plant fossils was limited† and much of it based on studies overseas; the names of Ettingshausen and Feistmantel come to mind as representative of such foreign contributors to our palaeobotany. Of course, von Mueller in Melbourne had worked on fossil as well as extant plants but his palaeontological interests had been concentrated on Tertiary problems.

The Mesozoic flora of Queensland, little known except that it was prolific, gave Walkom scope to learn the skills whereby he became the leading Australian palaeobotanist of his time. His work on the Mesozoic plants, much of it published by the Queensland Geological Survey, formed part of the thesis *Geology of the Lower Mesozoic rocks of Queensland, with special reference to their distribution and the correlation of their fossil flora* for which he earned the Sydney D.Sc. with University Medal in 1918. Meanwhile, in 1915 he had become Honorary Palaeontologist to the Queensland Museum and was already an active member of the local Royal Society. He edited that society's *Proceedings* from 1914 to 1919, served as its Honorary Secretary 1916–18 and, aged 29 years, became President in 1918.

His presidential year had hardly expired when he accepted the post of Secretary or chief executive officer of the Linnean Society, then still installed at the Linnean Hall in the grounds of Elizabeth Bay House. In those surroundings, with Fletcher as his first president, and with the centenary of Sir William Macleay's birth to be celebrated by the society in June 1920, Walkom could scarcely avoid immersion in Macleay and society history. His mastery of these subjects was soon challenged by the call to prepare a jubilee publication to

* Dun was a councillor of the Linnean Society of New South Wales from 1901 to 1919 and president 1913–15.

† The pioneering studies of our coal plants by such local men as Tenison Woods, Etheridge and Dun ought, however, to be acknowledged.

celebrate the society's first fifty years; that admirable review appeared in 1925. Diplomacy as well as history was needed to edit the second part of Fletcher's address on our heritage from the Macleays. That part dealing with Alexander Macleay and his sons William Sharp and George had appeared in 1920. But as Fletcher approached the work of Sir William Macleay, problems arose. Fletcher knew the man and his times too well to be dispassionate and in his address delivered broadsides against persons and institutions which, if committed to print, might have had unfortunate consequences. The council became decidedly concerned but was saved embarrassment by Fletcher's failure to complete copy for the printer. Yet there was so much of vital interest to the society in what Fletcher remembered and in the papers Sir William Macleay had entrusted to him. After his death in 1926 and with the generous co-operation of Mrs. Fletcher, Walkom was able to edit the material which appeared in our *Proceedings* in 1929. If it lacks the more fiery sections, the printed text is packed with detail of great importance for those seeking to discover the pattern of natural history and its exponents in late 19th-century Sydney; it is a monument to Walkom's tact and sense of history.

Walkom's secretarial duties included editing the *Proceedings* in addition to all the other manifold executive tasks. The compilation of an exemplary Index to the first 50 volumes of the *Proceedings* became something of a spare-time job that bore fruit in 1929. How he found time for all he did remains a mystery to this writer yet not only did he manage successfully but also kept up an admirable flow of research and, in addition, provided essential support for other scientific groups.

As Sydney grew and spread the location of the Linnean Society at Elizabeth Bay made it difficult of access to an increasing number of members. In 1923, property, then subject to lease, at 16 College Street in the city was purchased. A year later the lessee sought release and the council had no option but to occupy the premises. Walkom, of course, organized the transfer to what became known as Macleay House. Experience then must have helped him achieve an equally efficient move to Science House at 157 Gloucester Street in 1931.

Walkom's work as a palaeobotanist was recognized in 1926 by the Rockefeller Foundation of New York which awarded him a one-year fellowship in Biology. Council agreed to his taking leave for the period, nine months of which were spent at the Botany School in Cambridge working under Professor A. C. (later, Sir Albert) Seward, one of the leading palaeobotanists of his time. Among the other places visited then, Walkom made a pilgrimage to Sweden, to see the gardens and museum at Hammarby. A framed enlargement of one of his photographs of Linnaeus's gardens there used to add interest to the walls of the society's meeting room, in those more expansive days when we had one of our own. Walkom's later journeys abroad, such as those to South Africa in 1929 for the meetings of the British Association for the Advancement of Science and the 15th International Geological Congress, and to Washington, D.C., in 1933 for the 16th Congress, resulted from official invitations to attend as an Australian delegate.

Such invitations acknowledged Dr. Walkom's stature as a scientist and his already-impressive role as an organizer of scientific activities in Australia. It is worth recalling the unusual position the Linnean secretary then occupied in Australian science. Thanks to the Macleay gifts, our society alone of scientific associations in this country had the means to employ a professional man of science as its executive officer.

Long before Australia became a nation, an association of scientists from the various Australian colonies and New Zealand had been formed to arrange regular congresses and to co-ordinate activities. The Australasian Association for the Advancement of Science (later, the Australian and New Zealand

Association . . . or ANZAAS) began this work in 1888. It continues to act as a forum but throughout its long history has had to depend on the professional leadership of honorary officers. The same problems beset the Australian National Research Council appointed by the council of the Australasian Association in 1921 following suggestions made at conferences in Europe during 1918–19 that an International Research Council be established with which national councils in participating countries would be affiliated. On a slender budget the ANRC did valuable work until the Australian Academy of Science emerged to take over its role.

Walkom became an associate member of the ANRC in 1922 and a full member three years later. From the outset, he demonstrated not only his own personal sense of responsibility to science but also the great opportunities for good created by Sir William Macleay. In 1922 the ANRC established the series *Australian Science Abstracts* ; Walkom accepted the task of editor and continued to organize publication of the abstracts until 1929. The Guide Books prepared for the Pan-Pacific Science Congress in Australia, 1923, were also edited by Walkom. He served as Honorary Secretary of the ANRC from 1937–40. Even more impressive was his honorary service to the Australasian Association (or ANZAAS). That body profited from his devoted work as Honorary General Secretary from 1926 to 1947 during which time he became the founding Honorary Editor of the *Australian Journal of Science*. Walkom had been an annual member of the association since 1909, a fellow since 1939 and in 1955 became an Honorary Life Member. He acted as a Trustee from 1930 to 1971. He served as President of the association (1949–51) which acknowledged a record of unrivalled generosity of time and effort in the award of the ANZAAS Medal for 1970.

In April 1939, Walkom became an elective Trustee of the Australian Museum in Sydney but resigned about a year later following his decision to seek the directorship soon to be vacant through the retirement of Dr. Charles Anderson. His application successful, Walkom took over in November 1940 having resigned the Linnean secretaryship as from 31st October after 21 years of loyal service. Characteristically, he offered to continue as Honorary Secretary until a successor could be found. That offer was accepted and so Walkom remained on council but now as an ordinary member. Walkom had to endure some unusual problems connected with his new appointment. The fact that a man outside the public service of N.S.W. had been chosen as Director of the museum attracted protests from those in the system who felt they had qualifications requisite for the post. The Public Service Association took their grievances to the highest levels of government and although the association was careful to disclaim any personal animus against Dr. Walkom, arguing only on what it urged was a matter of principle, its actions and those of the colleagues that initiated it made life difficult during the new director's first months at the museum. The protests, in fact, were disallowed but Walkom needed a fine sense of diplomacy to weather the storm.

The transition from an office with a staff of one assistant secretary at the Linnean Society to the responsibility for a large public institution with an already-considerable staff (there were sixteen on the scientific staff alone !) would have been sufficiently difficult without the baptism of fire. Walkom responded with his usual dedication but it must be admitted that his efforts were not always regarded sympathetically. A naturally shy man, he seems to have maintained a rather solitary role at the museum, a role that attracted criticism from his staff but which may well have been a response to his initial experience there. Walkom, above all, was a fair-minded man, not one to engage in domestic politics. His museum critics also pointed to a conservative judgement and what they saw as reluctance to press the needs of the museum upon its

government masters. It would have been quite out of character had he attempted the stance of a noisy lobbyist but perhaps the absence of noise reflected no more than a realistic view. The critics ought to be aware that his directorate (he retired early in November, 1954, just short of his 65th birthday) began during war-time and ended while recovery from the war was still advancing. Museums and kindred cultural institutions like libraries held pretty low priorities in government budgets ; it would have been useless of the director to demand more in such circumstances. Walkom kept intact an active, effective museum system on which his successors, profiting from an expanded economy, have built and attracted kudos for it. Walkom's trustees at the museum had good reason to express regret when he announced his intention to retire ; their view that his services had been of great value was entirely justified. Those services, in fact, ranged far beyond the museum. From 1947 to 1954 he was member both of the Australian UNESCO Committee for Museums and the Australian National Advisory Committee for UNESCO. Work for UNESCO took him as an Australian delegate to that organization's general conference at Beirut in 1948. Later, as an official delegate he represented Australia at Science congresses in New Zealand (1949) and at Bangalore, India (1951).

Walkom's devotion to our society did not subside during those years at the Australian Museum. After a term as President (1941–42), he accepted the office of Honorary Treasurer in 1943 and remained so until advancing years forced him to seek release in 1970. For much of that time there were added also the duties of Honorary Secretary (editorial). Something of a crisis had faced the society early in 1951 when at short notice Dr. Dorothy Carroll resigned as Secretary. Post-war inflation was already eroding the capacity of our financial resources to maintain the many services members had come to expect. It was all too clear to council that the society could no longer afford a full-time paid professional Secretary. At that point two senior councillors, Drs. W. R. Browne and A. B. Walkom, offered their services as joint honorary secretaries, offers that were gratefully accepted. Walkom, still at the Museum and already Honorary Treasurer, agreed to take over editorial matters ; Browne became responsible for the other secretarial duties. That happy arrangement for the society continued until 1966 ; both men generously resumed the work for a few months during another emergency in 1969. At the end of that run, Walkom had edited the *Proceedings* for a total of 36 years. As members today look upon current issues and are reminded of famine-victims they must long for a return to volumes as thick and as scrupulously edited as those that came across Walkom's desk.

Had the Linnean Society of New South Wales any medals to bestow, Walkom would have been among the first recipients. Others made up for our inability. The ANZAAS Medal was mentioned earlier. From the Royal Society of New South Wales, of which he had been a member 1911–12 and since 1919 as well as President (1943–44), Walkom received the Clarke Medal (1948) for his researches in palaeobotany and the society's own medal (1953) for contributions to the organization of science in Australia. He was also holder fo the George V Jubilee Medal, the George VI Coronation Medal and the Elizabeth II Coronation Medal. Such awards were made to distinguished citizens by governments celebrating particular events. That the first two came to Walkom while he was Secretary of the Linnean Society reflects perhaps a little on the then distinction of the office as well as the officer. That thought made more sense to the writer when, sorting Dr. Walkom's private papers kindly put at his disposal by Miss Margaret Walkom, he found extracted from the *Sydney Morning Herald* a piece dealing with the salubrious areas of the North Shore district in Sydney. The journalist who contributed the piece awarded the palm for " poshness " to Killara and of the

distinguished residents of that select suburb, the Secretary of the Linnean Society had first mention !

Dr. Walkom, indeed, brought honour to our society. He did it quietly, unobtrusively. He did it through the remarkable amount of work he completed on behalf of the Linnean Society and other associations. And he managed it by dedication and wonderfully ordered habits. He had his routines and systems and kept to them. At meetings he rarely spoke except when presenting matter relating to his office and then the quiet, deep voice gave incisive utterance interspersed with almost nervous little coughs. One got the impression, even in his later years after such long experience, that he much preferred work to talking about it. Yet behind the formality and diffidence lay warm friendliness. He knew how to relax, preferably with a pipe and a glass of Scotch, and, if rarely expansive, he could nevertheless be induced without too much prompting to pass on fascinating stories of Australian scientists, science and societies. And the stories all seemed generous ; one does not recall him ever sounding sour or disgruntled.

Not surprisingly, as his administrative duties increased the time he could devote to palaeobotany diminished. If with his presidential address to ANZAAS in Hobart during 1949, the flow of original scientific publications came to an end, the work did not. In response to pressing invitations, chiefly from companies engaged in exploration for petroleum, he undertook a certain amount of consultancy investigations. Perhaps more recently the thrust in palaeobotany has turned to palynology and such aspects away from the fields of plant morphology and systematics that Walkom made his own in Australia but his place as one of the great pioneering figures in Australian fossil botany is secure. There is a certain irony, however, in the fact that the genus *Walkomia* was established in his honour by a Swedish palaeobotanist. But that reflects an international fame.

Dr. Walkom married Miss Constance Maclean, B.A., of Sydney ; they had been fellow-students of Geology at the university. Of the long and happy marriage came two children, a son David who became an engineer and died while still a young man leaving a widow and infant daughter, and a daughter Margaret who, after an outstanding academic career, joined the CSIRO and now occupies a senior editorial post with the organization in Melbourne. Mrs. Walkom predeceased her husband after a long period of ill-health that required increasingly his close attention. Indeed, he was only able to attend council meetings latterly through the kindness of friends who would come to release him from his watch for a few hours. Somehow it epitomized the man— a devoted husband who made deep, constructive friendships and was dedicated to the interests of a scientific society to which he had given the greater part of his life.

The Linnean Society of New South Wales is honoured to record its debt of gratitude to one who was both servant and leader. Our deepest sympathy goes to Miss Walkom, her niece and family.

Portrait and Note

A portrait of Dr. Walkom, commissioned by the Society to mark completion of 45 years of continuous service on council and his 75th birthday, appeared as frontispiece to volume 89 of our *Proceedings* (1964). Five years later, on 28th May 1969, council was privileged to celebrate Dr. Walkom's 50th anniversary as a councillor with a testimonial gift.

"[*We*] *shall not look upon his like again*"

Publications of A. B. Walkom

1911 : Note on a new species of *Favosites* from Yass district, N.S.W. *Proc. Linn. Soc. N.S.W.*, 36 : 700–701.

1912 : (with Browne, W. R.) : The geology of the eruptive and associated rocks of Pokolbin, New South Wales. *J. Proc. R. Soc. N.S.W.*, 45 (for 1911) : 379–408.

1913 : (with Cotton, L. A.) : Note on the relation of the Devonian and Carboniferous formations west of Tamworth, N.S.W. *Proc. Linn. Soc. N.S.W.*, 37 (for 1912) : 703–708.

1913 : Stratigraphical geology of the Permo-Carboniferous System in the Maitland-Branxton district, with some notes on the Permo-Carboniferous palaeogeography in New South Wales. *Proc. Linn. Soc. N.S.W.*, 38, 114–145.

1913 : The geology of the Permo-Carboniferous System in the Glendonbrook district, near Singleton, N.S.W. *Proc. Linn. Soc. N.S.W.*, 38 : 146–159.

1913 : Notes on some recently discovered occurrences of the pseudomorph, glendomite. *Proc. Linn. Soc. N.S.W.*, 38 : 160–168.

1915 : Mesozoic floras of Queensland. Part 1. The flora of the Ipswich and Walloon Series. (a) Introduction. (b) Equisetales. *Geol. Surv. Queensl., Publ.*, 252.

1916 : Report on the pyroxene granulites collected by the British Antarctic Expedition, 1907–09. *Brit. Antarct. Exped. 1907–9, Repts. Sci. Invest.*, Geology, 2 : 161–168.

1916 : *Fenestella* and *Polypora* (?) in south-eastern Queensland. *Proc. R. Soc. Queensl.*, 28 : 101–103.

1916 : Note on *Nilssonia mucronatum* (De Vis). *Mem. Queensl. Mus.*, 5 : 231–232.

1916 : Note on a specimen of *Annularia* from near Dunedoo, New South Wales. *Mem. Queensl. Mus.*, 5 : 233–234.

1918 : Mesozoic floras of Queensland. Part 2. The flora of the Maryborough (marine) Series. *Geol. Surv. Queensl., Publ.*, 262.

1918 : The geology of the lower Mesozoic rocks of Queensland, with special reference to their distribution and fossil flora, and their correlation with the lower Mesozoic rocks of other parts of Australia. *Proc. Linn. Soc. N.S.W.*, 43 : 37–115.

1919 : Mesozoic floras of Queensland. Parts 3 and 4. The floras of the Burrum and Styx River Series. *Geol. Surv. Queensl., Publ.*, 263.

1919 : Presidential address. Queensland fossil floras. *Proc. R. Soc. Queensl.*, 31,: 1–20.

1919 : On a collection of Jurassic plants from Bexhill, near Lismore, N.S.W. *Proc. Linn. Soc. N.S.W.*, 44 : 180–190.

1920 : Note on the correlation of the fossil floras of the Carboniferous rocks. (Appendix to Sussmilch, C. A., and David, T. W. E., Sequence, glaciation and correlation of the Carboniferous rocks of the Hunter River district, New South Wales). *J. Proc. R. Soc. N.S.W.*, 53 (for 1919) : 282–287.

1921 : On the occurence of *Otozamites* in Australia with descriptions of specimens from Western Australia. *Proc. Linn. Soc. N.S.W.*, 46 : 147–153.

1921 : On a specimen of *Noeggerathiopsis* from the Lower Coal Measures of New South Wales. *Proc. Linn. Soc. N.S.W.*, 46 : 374–375.

1921 : Mesozoic floras of New South Wales. Part 1. Fossil plants from Cockabutta Mountain and Talbragar. *Mem. Geol. Surv. N.S.W., Palaeontol.*, No. 12.

1921 : On *Nummulospermum*, gen. nov. the probable megasporangium of *Glossopteris*. *Q. J. Geol. Soc. London*, 77 : 289–295.

1922 : Palaeozoic floras of Queensland. Part 1. The flora of the Lower and Upper Bowen Series. *Geol. Surv. Queensl., Publ.*, 270.

1924 : The floras of the Carboniferous and Permian in eastern Australia. *Proc. Pan-Pacific Sci. Congr.*, (Australia, 1923), 2 : 1077–1078.

1924 : On fossil plants from Bellevue, near Esk. *Mem. Queensl. Mus.*, 8 : 77–92.

1924 : Notes on some Tasmanian Mesozoic plants. Part 1. *Pap. Proc. R. Soc. Tas.*, 1924 : 73–89.

1925 : Notes on some Tasmanian Mesozoic plants. Part 2. *Pap. Proc. R. Soc. Tas.*, 1925 : 63–74.

1925 : *The Linnean Society of New South Wales. Historical notes of its first fifty years.* (Jubilee publication) Sydney.

1925 : Fossil plants from the Narrabeen stage of the Hawkesbury Series. *Proc. Linn. Soc. N.S.W.*, 50 : 214–234.

1928 : Fossil plants from Plutoville, Cape York Peninsula. *Proc. Linn. Soc. N.S.W.*, 53 : 145–150.

1928 : Fossil plants from the Upper Palaeozoic rocks of New South Wales. *Proc. Linn. Soc. N.S.W.*, 53 : 255–269.

1928 : Lepidodendroid remains from Yalwal, N.S.W. *Proc. Linn. Soc. N.S.W.*, 53 : 310–314.

1928 : Fossil plants from the Esk district, Queensland. *Proc. Linn. Soc. N.S.W.*, 53 : 458–468.

1928 : Notes on some additions to the *Glossopteris* flora in New South Wales. *Proc. Linn. Soc. N.S.W.*, 53 : 555–564.

1929 : Note on a fossil wood from Central Australia. *Proc. Linn. Soc. N.S.W.*, 54 : 147–148.

1929 : (editor—anonymous) : *The Proceedings of the Linnean Society of New South Wales. Index to volumes I-L (1875–1925).* Sydney.

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1932 : Fossil plants from Mount Piddington and Clarence Siding. *Proc. Linn. Soc. N.S.W.*, 57 : 123–126.
1934 : Notes on some Carboniferous plants from New South Wales. *Proc. Linn. Soc. N.S.W.*, 59 : 430–434.
1935 : A short history of the Association. *ANZAAS Handbook for Victoria.* (Melbourne Mtg., 1935), pp. 5–7.
1935 : The limits of the Permian System in Australia. *Rept. XVI Int. Geol. Congr.* (Washington, 1933), pp. 621–628.
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1939 : Contribution to " Discrepancies between the chronological testimony of fossil plants and animals ". *Proc. 25th Indian Sci. Congr.*, 1939 : 187–188.
1941 : On a new species of *Annularia* from New South Wales. *Rec. Aust. Mus.*, 21 : 43–44.
1941 : Portrait of Alexander Macleay. *Aust. Mus. Mag.*, 7 : 327–328.
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